

HAER
ILL
50-MARS,
6-

NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY, MARSEILLES FACTORY
(Nabisco Main Carton Factory)
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor
Off Main Street on Marseilles Power Canal
Marseilles
LaSalle County
Illinois

HAER No. IL-68

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY, MARSEILLES FACTORY
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Location: West of Main Street, on Marseilles Power Canal,
Marseilles, LaSalle County, Illinois

UTM: 16 E.356850 N.4576220
Quad: Marseilles

Date of Construction: Marseilles Factory, ca. 1902
Main Carton Factory, 1920

Builder: unknown

Present Owner: Federal Paperboard Company

Present Use: Industrial

Significance: Since 1832 the falls at Marseilles was a source of water power for industry. In 1902 the National Biscuit Company purchased the site and expanded it into a large industrial complex. The most impressive structure, the eight-story Carton Factory (built in 1920), is one of the area's visual landmarks.

Project Information: The Illinois and Michigan Canal was designated a National Heritage Corridor in 1984. The following year HABS/HAER embarked on an extensive inventory and documentation project of the 100 mile-long corridor. Field work for this project was concluded in 1988. Final editing of the documentation was completed in 1992.

Historians: Gray Fitzsimons, David Kelliher, and Timothy Whittaker, 1986.

Situated along the Illinois River adjacent to the falls at Marseilles, this industrial complex of the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco) consists of fourteen buildings and a hydraulic system that includes a diversion dam and a series of power canals. Water power from the falls at Marseilles on the Illinois River was developed as early as 1832 when Ephraim Sprague established a sawmill. A number of other industries were established here throughout the nineteenth century, including an oatmeal mill, a farm implement manufacturer, and various electric power companies. The predominant industry, however, was paper making and several firms were located here including J. F. Clark Paper Company, the Columbia Straw Paper Company and the Marseilles Wrapping Paper Company. Soon after 1900, when the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco) was in the process of expanding its operation in New York, the Howe & Davidson Company in Marseilles was producing paper board boxes. In 1902 Nabisco purchased the site and began work on a new paper mill.

Nabisco expanded its Marseilles operation further in 1920 when it constructed a new brick factory for producing paper cartons. Completed in 1921, this impressive eight-story building quickly became a local landmark. Measuring approximately 180' x 150', the building is composed of a reinforced concrete frame on a concrete foundation and contains a brick veneer, multi-light windows, brick lintels and sills, and flat roof. Decorative features include a cream-colored string course at top of sixth and eighth stories and three red-brick turrets housing elevator shafts. A large "NABISCO" sign is painted on the east facade. The building contained numerous printing presses and automated machinery for cutting, gluing, and folding the paper board. Finished products were shipped from the first floor. At present the building is used for offices, shipping, and storage. A number of changes were made to the complex between 1920 and the 1970s. In 1984 the property was purchased by the Federal Paper Board Company, which immediately closed the plant's paper mill but continued the printing and carton-making operations.

Other buildings include: The Printing Building/Former Carton Factory is one of the original structures built by Nabisco when it acquired the property in 1902. The three-story brick building measures 130' x 110' and contains a slightly-pitched gable roof supported by timber trusses.

The Mill Room, erected in 1902, is a two-story brick building housing machinery for milling paper board. It measures approximately 300' x 90' and contains an interior timber frame, a gable-roof and monitor, multi-light windows, and stone foundation

(recently partially rebuilt with concrete). This building presently stands unused; however, the milling machinery remains intact.

The Warehouses consist of five buildings, two of which date from ca. 1902. The other three buildings date from the 1960s. The two early 1900s buildings are constructed of brick with interior timber frames. One of them measures approximately 210' x 100' and contains an ornamented brick cornice. The other measures approximately 165' x 50'. Railroad spur lines extend along the warehouses.

The Rotary Building, approximately 110' x 50', was built ca. 1902 and consists of brick walls with an interior timber frame. The Straw Room/Storage Building, dating from the 1920s, stores straw and other paper-making materials before processing in the Rotary Building. The Beater Room, erected in the 1950s, houses machinery used in processing paper. The two-story, concrete-block building housed steel tanks that contained large blades for chopping scrap paper. Following the chopping of the paper, water was added and the vat was heated. The pulp was then removed for pressing into paper board. The machinery is still in place, although it is unused.

The two Finished Product Warehouses, erected about 1920-21, are located on Commercial Street and connect with the factory complex via a railroad spur. They are long, narrow, timber-frame buildings with corrugated metal siding and concrete foundations.

The Boiler House, erected ca. 1920-21, contains a reinforced concrete frame with a brick veneer; the boilers remain in place as do the two brick chimneys, one of which is approximately 160' tall and the other nearly 120' in height. The former Consolidated Water & Light Co. Power Plant was erected about 1907 and subsequently acquired by Nabisco. The building measures 50' x 40' and contains pilastered brick walls, an ornate cornice, and a large timber roof truss. Originally this building contained two turbines and generators; however, by 1913 it was vacant. More recently Nabisco has used the building for storage. The Nabisco Power House was built about 1900, originally serving as a factory for the O'Neil Implement Company. Nabisco acquired the O'Neil factory around 1925 and converted it into a hydroelectric plant, installing three turbines and generators. In addition, the building housed a steam turbine-generator. More recently the two-story, brick building has served as a warehouse; none of the power generating equipment survives.

The Printing Building, (erected ca. 1970), is the newest structure in factory complex; it is a two-story concrete-block building, measuring approximately 220' x 150'.

SOURCES:

Sanborn Map Co., Marseilles, Illinois (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1889, 1898, 1907, 1913, 1929).

Nabisco Co., correspondence, 1950s - 1960s, available at Nabisco factory, Marseilles, Illinois.

Historical Booklet Committee, Marseilles Sesquicentennial, 1835-1985 (Coal City, IL: Bailey Printing Co., 1985).

"N.B. Co. Has Modern Carton Factory Here," Marseilles Daily Press, August 28, 1935.